## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 10 | **Name:** | Mike Reed |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2021-B0137 | **Date:** | October 6, 2021 |

**SUBJECT**

Committee Review of the Wastewater Treatment Division Clean Water Plan planning project.

**SUMMARY**

The Wastewater Treatment Division is continuing with a broad-scale planning effort of Division priorities and strategies across programs and agency services. This review, referred to as the Clean Water Plan, comes as the agency is faced with an increasingly challenging mix of mandates and program demands, together with potential rate impacts. Today’s briefing is part of a series of briefings in preparation for development of a recommended strategy addressing the future direction of the wastewater system.

**BACKGROUND**

The regional wastewater system is at a critical juncture in its development as a system. It is facing increasing pressures across the range of service offerings. These include the aging of the system and accelerated maintenance needs (both West Point and South treatment plants celebrated their 50-year anniversaries recently); increasing concerns about water quality-related issues; increasing regulatory requirements; increasing growth-related capacity concerns; climate change-related storm patterns that challenge system operations; and increasing rate pressures resulting from these system developments. Concurrently, there are discussions about alternative approaches to managing wastewater, including distributed systems, stricter biosolids standards, and stormwater retention opportunities. In sum, major strategic directional questions are facing the system, and have led to the initiation of a process to inventory, evaluate, and address the policy options associated with these questions.

In response to these developments, the Wastewater Treatment Division has undertaken a planning process, referred to as the Clean Water Plan. Planners have progressed through a number of stages in the planning effort, including outreach to stakeholders, identification of key decision areas, development of potential action alternatives for these decision areas, and policy considerations associated with potential actions. Most recently, the planning process has identified five Strategy options, packaging identified actions under primary themes.

Planners are anticipating structuring the October 6, 2021 RWQC briefing around an opportunity for RWQC committee members to raise questions and issues of concern. The agency has invited members to identify questions in writing if possible. As follow-up, committee staff recently sent a note to members requesting any written questions, to be forwarded to the agency to support their preparation for the briefing.

Staff has received a number of questions in response, and has forwarded them to the agency; those questions are provided below.

**Questions Received from Committee Members**

Sharon,

Thanks for your email. Here are some questions and comments that I have. I am also copying King County Councilperson Kathy Lambert (RWQC Chair), Mayor Penny Sweet (SCA Caucus Chair), and Kazia Mermel, who is a Policy Analyst with Sound Cities Association, on this email.

Process Questions

1. My notes from Workshop No. 4 state that financial information relative to the various strategies are to be developed and shared during Q2 of 2022. Is that the earliest expected financial information is to be provided to the public? Will some of that financial information be broken down and provided in terms of potential impact on future rates payable by ratepayers in different King County municipalities? If not, why not? If not, how are municipalities (especially smaller municipalities like Mercer Island and who lack staff) determine the impact on its residents?
2. While King County staff is gathering information and responses to the various strategies, please describe in greater detail the process by which the Executive Preferred Strategy/Alternatives will be developed. What specific criteria will staff be applying in its determination of the Executive Preferred Strategy? While I note that "quality outcomes," "costs outcomes," and "social outcomes" are mentioned as part of the strategy evaluation, these general descriptors don't discuss with any specificity the criteria/factors that will be used. What will be the balancing act?
3. After the Executive Preferred Strategy is presented, what if any further public engagement process will there be? If there is to be further public engagement with third-party stakeholders, what does that public engagement process look like and how will any public responses be addressed/considered in the possible further refinement of the Executive Preferred Strategy?
4. Given the long-range planning aspect of the Clean Water Plan, do you anticipate the Executive Preferred Strategy including required periodic status reports to the public and periodic reviews to consider changing circumstances? If so, please describe what that periodic review process might look like. Would MWPAAC and the KCRWQC be involved?

Policy Area Questions

1. Unfortunately, I had to leave the Workshop No. 4 before it was completed. I would be interested (curious) to know where WTD staff is regarding the importance of the policy areas that it believes might need further discussion (selecting among wastewater treatment, wet weather management, aging infrastructure/asset management, climate change, and equity and social justice). Do the staff's concerns align with those of the Workshop No. 4 attendees?
2. Is the listing/ranking of the importance of policy areas to have any impact the various strategies that have been developed to date? If so, how? It seems that the listing/ranking of the importance of the policy areas should have been done prior to the development of the various strategies. Was it?

Other Questions/Comments

1. While the Clean Water Plan will be adopted by King County, there are aspects of it that go beyond King County, e.g. climate change issues. How is King County planning on working with legislators down in Olympia in enacting legislation needed to help further the goals of the Clean Water Plan?
2. I know that the Mercer Island City Council is currently scheduled to have a study session on the Clean Water Plan either in October or November. Do we know if other King County cities have held similar study sessions or if they are planning to do so? Because so few elected officials are joining the workshops, has WTD staff proactively reached out to the different cities to offer speakers at study sessions? If not, I would recommend that it do so because per the updated schedule it appears that Q2 of 2022 might mark the end of when elected officials might have meaningful input on the development of the Executive Preferred Strategy.

Thanks for providing this opportunity to submit questions in advance of the RWQC October 6 meeting.

Benson

**City of Seattle Questions on the King County Clean Water Plan**

**Submitted on behalf of Councilmembers Herbold and Pedersen**

**RWQC discussion, October 2021**

1. The current scope of Clean Water Plan is problematic and unfocused. Like the current Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP), the Clean Water Plan needs to be concentrated solely on wastewater. There are critical and costly issues facing the regional wastewater system – key elements include asset management, CSOs, nutrients, and climate change impacts. Including other issues, such as stormwater, inappropriately pulls focus away from the importance task of preparing for our region’s wastewater needs.
   1. How will you assure that a robust, strategic but focused plan that adequately addresses our wastewater system needs will come out of this process?
   2. How will you assure this plan appropriately preserves wastewater funds for wastewater purposes?
2. We need to better understand the rate impacts of actions and strategies before decisions are made. How will you assure this happens before the plan is finalized?
3. Like the County, the Seattle is making significant investments in stormwater treatment, including GSI, as guided by our NPDES permit. Planning efforts around stormwater could be better coordinated between Seattle and King County, but the Clean Water Plan is not the place for that. Rather, this could be done through other more appropriate planning processes. How can the County move this forward, outside of the Clean Water Planning process?
4. How will you better assure actions that overlap are considered more comprehensively and thoroughly to assure the best investments are made? For example, proposals to expand capacity at wastewater treatment plants need to be considered with implementation of distributed wastewater treatment approaches. How will come together to create a strategic plan?
5. How will decision criteria be developed and applied to assure actions will be appropriately assessed? How will you get appropriate input from stakeholders on the decision criteria and how they are applied?
6. Another significant concern is the level of service related to asset management being assumed. How will King County determine the appropriate level of service that better strikes an appropriate balance between cost and risk/system need?
7. The proposed actions and strategies cannot be appropriately refined or selected unless the related goal or policy to be achieved is clear. How will you develop and vet the goals and policies to guide development of actions and strategies? How will you assure the actions and strategies of the plan lead to compliance with wastewater regulations?
8. How has the outreach and engagement and stakeholder involvement specifically influenced and impacted the actions or strategies in the CWP? How will stakeholders have a meaningful opportunity to further refine the actions before they are rolled up into strategies?

**INVITED**

* Kamuron Gurol, Director, Wastewater Treatment Division
* Steve Tolzman, Clean Water Plan Project Lead, Wastewater Treatment Division

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. “Making the Right Investments at the Right Time” Clean Water Plan Presentation
2. WTD Supplemental Briefing Document